

Preface to the Hendrickson Edition

JOHN (JEAN) CALVIN
1509–1564

The Protestant Reformation boasts a constellation of star players: Martin Luther, John Wycliffe, Jan Hus, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, John Knox, Thomas Cranmer. Each of these men shepherded the Reformation in a specific region of Europe, and each offered a distinct contribution to the Reformation movement at large. John Calvin, who was the voice of the Reformation in France and Geneva, arguably ranks as Protestantism's most prominent and influential thinkers. The legacy of his theology and teaching reached across Europe and reaches across five centuries.

Of course, John Calvin was not the man who dramatically launched the Protestant Reformation. That, of course, is the legacy of the German cleric Martin Luther. Countering the prevailing sixteenth-century Catholic view of a God whose wrath could be bought off by mandated prayers, stringent disciplines, and monetary payments, the Reformers looked to Scripture and found a God who graciously gave a gift of saving faith. The aphorism “Scripture alone; grace alone; faith alone” summarizes the basic Reformation message.

Calvin took his place among a “second generation” of reformers who were hammering out their distinctive theologies, often with ardent disciples in a particular region and language group. Because of his influential writings (in Latin and French), his systematic pattern of church government, and through the results of the academy-university he founded, Calvin, though relatively short-lived, stands alongside Luther as the most notable of the sixteenth-century Reformers.

BACKGROUND AND YOUTH

John Calvin didn't write much about his early years, but in some ways his family situation set the stage for his later life. He was born in Noyon, France, a Catholic cathedral town northeast of Paris. Noyon had been a hub of religious and political activity for centuries, seeing the crowning of Pepin the Short (752 A.D.) and the consecration of Charlemagne (768 A.D.).

John was the second of seven sons (two of whom died as children) born to Gerard Cauvin and his first wife, Jeanne le Franc, the daughter of a local innkeeper; by a second wife Gerard fathered two daughters. The son of a boatman, Gerard received an education and served as a Noyon Cathedral business administrator and lawyer. Having some influence in the church, Gerard arranged benefices (incomes) for his sons, essentially funding their education. At fourteen, John, at his father's bidding, went to Paris in pursuit of a Latin, theological education—and to flee the plague in Noyon. Some have attributed his lifetime of poor health—migraines and digestive distress—to harsh conditions and bad food in college.

But when disagreements between Gerard and his clerical employers resulted in Gerard's dismissal from the Roman Church, he urged John to change his career pursuits and study law. A dutiful son, in 1528 John went to Orleans and then to Bourges, earning a doctorate of law,

and learning Greek on the side. In law school, though largely a humanist, he maintained an interest in theology, reading works of Reformers older than he, such as Martin Luther (1483–1546), who had been excommunicated in 1520, and Ulrich Zwingli (1481–1531), and making friends among those who sympathized with German Lutherans.

After the death of his father in 1531, John (who had Latinized his family name Cauvin to Calvinus or Calvin) returned to Paris to study ancient languages, and completed his first book, a commentary on Seneca's *Treatise on Clemency*, published in the spring of 1532. It was considered a brilliant work, though not exactly a commercial success.

The next two years thrust the studious Calvin into the first of many controversies. After a friend, Nicholas Cop, stirred up controversy with an address that included reformational themes, Cop and Calvin fled Paris to avoid arrest. Calvin later said that about this time he experienced a "sudden conversion," being convicted of the authority of the Scriptures and sensing a personal call to obedience. Consequently, in May 1534, he returned briefly to Noyon to disengage from his church benefices, separating him from the Roman church in the most fundamental and practical sense.

By late in 1534, the French king, Francis I, now himself the target of the most ardent French Protestants, was denouncing and threatening "anarchist" Protestants. Turning his words to action, he had Protestants jailed and executed. Tens of thousands are said to have been martyred, with entire villages sometimes decimated. Calvin fled France and sought refuge in the Protestant territory of Basel (Switzerland). It was in these formative years, in his mid-twenties, that he also formulated the initial outline of the rudimentary edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which was first published, in Latin, in 1536.

THE ROAD TO LEADERSHIP

As summer approached in 1536, after a brief trip to Italy and back into France, Calvin and a brother and stepsister set out for the "free" city of Strasbourg, where Calvin expected to continue his scholarly pursuits. But strife between France and the Holy Roman Empire forced the travelers to take a serious detour through Geneva (Switzerland). In terms of the history of Europe, that change of itinerary has nearly "biblical" significance. As the Gospel writer says of Jesus, "He must needs go through Samaria" (John 4:4): so, it seemed, Calvin needed to sojourn to Geneva.

As the author of the *Institutes*, Calvin's scholastic reputation preceded him. At that time the work was presented in a basic question-and-answer format, similar to Luther's *Little Catechism*. News spread of his arrival, and prompted quick action on the part of Guillaume Farel (1489–1565), a dynamic, impetuous acquaintance of Calvin's who had swayed much of French-speaking Switzerland toward Protestantism. Farel immediately confronted Calvin and threatened him with the wrath of God if he didn't stay in Geneva, which, allied with the city of Bern, had months earlier declared itself Protestant—no longer under the control of a Catholic bishop or Savoyard duke. Calvin submitted to what he perceived to be God's call upon his life. "I was so terror-stricken that I did not continue my journey." He settled in Geneva to help lead the church, and thus the city.

At first Calvin gave biblical lectures. Then he preached. For years Geneva had maintained citizens' councils, and in 1537, Farel and Calvin presented the city's Little Council with governmental and ecclesiastical recommendations, which were adopted in a modified form. But

opposition fomented, fueled by the neighboring city of Bern and by the fact that Calvin was a fiery foreigner. In April 1538, Farel and Calvin were both banished from the city.

Calvin at last moved on to Strasbourg, where he pastored French refugees, lectured, wrote a commentary on Romans, revised and expanded his *Institutes*—and, with the encouragement of a mentor, Martin Bucer, found a wife. In 1540, then thirty-one, after discounting several suggested prospects, Calvin married a parishioner. An attractive, intelligent mother of two, Idelette was the recent widow of John Stordeur, an articulate Anabaptist leader who had joined Calvin's church. Calvin took the Stordeur children as his own; no child born to Idelette and John survived infancy. Idelette died in 1549, having been ill for some time, possibly with tuberculosis. John never remarried.

RETURN TO GENEVA

By 1541 the political climate in Geneva had changed. The somewhat pro-Catholic Bern influence had receded, and Calvin supporters begged him to return. His strong sense of God's call on his life, as in 1536, added to his certainty of God's preordained plans, drove Calvin's response. In September he returned to Geneva, a gentler pastor-leader, possibly tamed by Idelette, whom he called the "faithful helper of my ministry."

Church historian John Leith notes: "Luther wanted to eliminate from the life of the church everything condemned by Scripture, but the Swiss [particularly earlier German-Swiss Reformer Ulrich Zwingli] insisted that every Christian practice should have positive warrant in Scripture." This positive concern for change, more than a focus on separation from the Catholic Church, is the origin of the "Reformed tradition" within the Protestant tradition. While Luther's focus was on *cleansing* the Church, Calvin, expanding on Zwingli's vision, took reform out into the community at large, hoping to transform society.

With this in mind, Calvin intended to make Geneva a model community, based on biblical teaching. Under the tutelage of Martin Bucer in Strasbourg, he had identified a fourfold New Testament leadership schema—pastor, teacher, elder, deacon—which in Geneva he laid out and proposed as "Ecclesiastical Ordinances." Again the city councils adopted Calvin's recommendations in an adapted form. Men carrying out these four roles in effect managed the city-state. Pastors, of course, performed the duties of the clergy: preaching, administering the sacraments, and providing spiritual teaching to the people. Teachers supplied education for the city's adults and children. Elders provided oversight to ecclesiastical (and consequently civil) discipline, and were representatives from the community councils. Deacons selected by the congregation cared for the poor and administered the hospitals.

The local church and state issues of the time are difficult to sort out. Calvin was paid by the city council; as pastor, he was not a dictator over politically powerless people. Calvin saw distinctly separate church-versus-state functions. Yet since the pastor "spoke for God," the balance of power leaned toward the authority and opinions of the clergy. Even so, Calvin encountered severe local opposition to his reforms and what some have called his "strenuous rule." The fact that Calvin was a foreigner (he would not become a citizen until 1559) added to this opposition. He was a French citizen in a Swiss city-state, a man whose high profile was drawing other foreigners, including refugees fleeing persecution in France. Protestors would disrupt his preaching—firing gunshots, intimidating him with dogs, and threatening his life.

But Calvin's theological certitude withstood many challenges and conflicts, including the 1551 trial of Jerome Bolsec, a former Catholic monk who had become a Protestant physician. Bolsec vigorously countered Calvin's doctrine of predestination—the very underpinnings of his clerical and civil authority. (Bolsec was banished and later wrote a slanderous and historically destructive biography of Calvin.) In 1553, as public support for Calvin again ebbed lower, his supporters were once again galvanized by the arrest, trial, and execution of Miguel Servetus, the infamous author of a book that discounted the more universally accepted and fundamental doctrine of the Trinity. Servetus had been arrested when he traveled to Geneva, and was later burned at the stake, though Calvin appealed for a more humane execution.

A prodigious letter writer, Calvin wore himself out trying to broker resolutions to theological disputes among Protestants. On several key points he maintained a middle ground between Lutherans (who held to the beliefs of infant baptism, the “real presence” of Christ in the Eucharistic elements, and liturgical worship) and Anabaptists (who disavowed infant baptism, held a commemorative view of communion, and simplified their worship settings). Calvin approved of infant baptism, but said that Christ was “spiritually present” in the Eucharist. As pastor of three churches, Calvin encouraged vigorous congregational singing of the psalms and a combination of spontaneous and fixed prayers.

Now middle-aged, Calvin was overworked with daily preaching, teaching, and writing, producing comprehensive biblical commentaries and other books, including yet another expanded edition of the *Institutes*. Yet somehow he found time, at age fifty, to found the Geneva Academy. Its secondary school taught French, Latin, Greek, and philosophy. Its college, which became the University of Geneva, specialized in Hebrew, Greek, philosophy, arts, and theology. In terms of the history of Europe, this institution may have been Calvin's crowning achievement. Scholars from this school, taught by Calvin himself and others, spread out across Europe, in effect serving as Reformed missionary-disciples to France (Huguenots), the Netherlands (Dutch Reformed), England (Puritans), Scotland (Presbyterians), Germany, and Italy.

But Calvin's weak physical constitution could not maintain the pace. For the last five years of his life, until his death in 1564, at age 54, he worked through pain and sickness, sometimes so weak that he gave lectures in his bedroom. When urged to slow down, he quipped: “What? Would you have the Lord find me idle when he comes?” Despite, or maybe because of, his international renown, Calvin requested that he be buried in an unmarked grave in a public cemetery—his whereabouts unknown except to his Maker-Redeemer.

In his final illness, Calvin commented on his own life: “While I am nothing, yet I know that I have prevented many disturbances that would otherwise have occurred in Geneva . . . God has given me the power to write . . . I have written nothing in hatred . . . but always I have faithfully attempted what I believed to be for the glory of God.”

THEOLOGICAL GIANT

Nearly five hundred years have passed since John Calvin systematized a theology and form of church government that influenced the political and spiritual landscape of the Western world. Some claim that his emphasis on congregational-community leadership fueled the rise of democracy in Europe, to say nothing of the American Revolution.

His theological writings are monumental, including commentaries on every biblical book except the Song of Solomon and Revelation. (Most were transcribed from his teaching lectures.) But this volume, his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which lays out the foundational principles of Christianity, is the crowning publication of his career. As previously noted, he published the first draft in 1536 in Basel. Historian Williston Walker called the preface of this first edition “one of the literary masterpieces of the Reformation age”; addressed to Francis I, king of France, it entreated him to desist in his persecution of Protestants. That first edition has been called “pocket-sized”—though that is a relative term, as it bulked to 520 pages. Its question-and-answer format mirrored Luther’s *Little Catechism*, and it included six chapters: (1) Concerning the law; (2) Concerning faith; (3) On prayer; (4) Concerning the sacraments: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper; (5) Concerning the five other sacraments which are not really sacraments; and (6) Concerning Christian liberty, of the power of the church and the civil government. The book was written as a teaching tool for laypeople who were “hungering and thirsting after Christ” but had little knowledge of the basics of the Christian faith. It also established Calvin’s orthodoxy in terms of the historical creeds and showed that he was not promoting anarchy, or disregarding or disrespecting civil law.

In 1539 Calvin expanded the *Institutes* to seventeen chapters, again in Latin, but also published in French in 1541. He reorganized the work and left the question-and-answer format (although he returned to it in his pedagogical, fifty-five session *Catechism of the Church of Geneva*). In this second edition he addressed theological issues (knowledge of God) before knowledge of ourselves in relation to God.

In 1543 he published a third edition, of twenty-one chapters, which he also translated into French.

In 1559 he published a final, massive, revised edition, comprising eighty chapters in four “books.” Corresponding to sections of the Apostles’ Creed, the four books deal with God the Creator; God the Redeemer; God the Holy Spirit and his work of grace; and finally the church or society of Christ.

FIVE POINTS AND ONE THOUSAND PAGES

Much has been made of so-called “five-point Calvinism,” known by the acronym TULIP. This stands for

- (1) Total depravity (no one is capable of saving oneself);
- (2) Unconditional election (God’s choosing of the saved isn’t conditioned by anything in them);
- (3) Limited atonement (Christ’s atonement is adequate to save all people but it is efficient for God’s elect only);
- (4) Irresistible grace (the sovereignly given gift of faith cannot be rejected by the elect);
- (5) Perseverance of the saints (those who are regenerated and justified will persevere in the faith).

While Calvin held these views, the five points were identified as such much later, in the Canons of Dort (Netherlands) in the seventeenth-century.

As evidenced in this thousand-page volume, Calvin's theology was deeper and wider than a five-point list or the descriptive word *predestination*, which centuries earlier Augustine had defended, based on Pauline writings. Calvin foundationally presumed a loving, merciful, personal—Trinitarian—God who actively sought out sinners to draw them to himself. Calvin used two key phrases to describe the Christian life: that faith is the “principal work” of the Holy Spirit; that prayer is the “principal exercise” of faith. All of life was to be lived before God as a prayer—as a dialogue with a personal God. Within this life of prayer, in gratitude for the gracious gift of salvation, believers would live orderly, socially redemptive lives.

THIS EDITION

This Hendrickson Publishers edition of the *Institutes* is based on the 1845 English translation of Calvin's last and fullest Latin edition. That translation was done by Henry Beveridge, Esq., of the Calvin Translation Society, an avid and devoted translator of many of Calvin's works, from his shorter letters and pamphlets to his longer treatises. Besides consulting Thomas Norton's English translation of the *Institutes* (Fourth Edition, 1581), Beveridge compared Calvin's own translation of his work into French, as he sought to faithfully render the Latin text into English. Along with his translation, Beveridge also provided copious footnotes and textual comments discussing issues of meaning and translation and tracing Calvin's many literary sources. The result was not only an accurate translation, but a helpful reference work that became the standard English edition of Calvin's *Institutes* for readers and researchers of subsequent generations. In this new edition, Beveridge's translation has been retypeset in modern typefaces and combined into a single volume with continuous page numbering. In addition, numerous corrections have been made, and the indexes have been expanded, updated, and grouped at the back. The *Institutes* is a vast reservoir of references to source materials, and this edition helps readers tap into those riches by clarifying, expanding, and updating the hundreds of references to authors and works throughout the book, and by including a significantly more comprehensive Authors and Works Cited index.

Theologians have had nearly five hundred years to analyze, dispute, and criticize Calvin's body of work. In every generation, new questions are raised concerning definitions, levels of meaning, and degrees of depth. Some would say that Calvin's pastoral and pedagogical focus has been distorted by fractious factions. We suggest you read the work itself. Consider its context, in sixteenth-century Reformation Europe, and judge it on its own merits.

Turn the page, and let Calvin speak.

Introduction to the Original Edition of the Henry Beveridge Translation (1845)

by The Rev. John Murray, M.A., Th.M.

The publication in English of another edition of the *opus magnum* of Christian theology is an event fraught with much encouragement. Notwithstanding the decadence so patent in our present-day world and particularly in the realm of Christian thought and life, the publishers have confidence that there is sufficient interest to warrant such an undertaking. If this faith is justified we have reason for thanksgiving to God. For what would be a better harbinger of another Reformation than widespread recourse to the earnest and sober study of the Word of God which would be evinced by the readiness carefully to peruse the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

Dr. B. B. Warfield in his admirable article, "On the Literary History of the *Institutes*," has condensed for us the appraisal accorded Calvin's work by the critics who have been most competent to judge. Among these tributes none expresses more adequately, and none with comparable terseness, the appraisal which is Calvin's due than that of the learned Joseph Scaliger, "Solus inter theologos Calvinus."

It would be a presumptuous undertaking to try to set forth all the reasons why Calvin holds that position of eminence in the history of Christian theology. By the grace and in the overruling providence of God there was the convergence of multiple factors, and all of these it would be impossible to trace in their various interrelations and interactions. One of these, however, calls for special mention. Calvin was an exegete and biblical theologian of the first rank. No other one factor comparably served to equip Calvin for the successful prosecution of his greatest work which in 1559 received its definitive edition.

The attitude to Scripture entertained by Calvin and the principles which guided him in its exposition are nowhere stated with more simplicity and fervor than in the Epistle Dedicatory to his first commentary, the commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. "Such veneration," he says, "we ought indeed to entertain for the Word of God, that we ought not to pervert it in the least degree by varying expositions; for its majesty is diminished, I know not how much, especially when not expounded with great discretion and with great sobriety. And if it be deemed a great wickedness to contaminate any thing that is dedicated to God, he surely cannot be endured, who, with impure, or even with unprepared hands, will handle that very thing, which of all things is the most sacred on earth. It is therefore an audacity, closely allied to a sacrilege, rashly to turn Scripture in any way we please, and to indulge our fancies as in sport; which has been done by many in former times" (English Translation, Grand Rapids, 1947, p. 27).

It was Calvin preeminently who set the pattern for the exercise of that sobriety which guards the science of exegesis against those distortions and perversions to which allegorizing methods are ever prone to subject the interpretation and application of Scripture. The debt we owe to Calvin in establishing sound canons of interpretation and in thus directing the future course of exegetical study is incalculable. It is only to be lamented that too frequently

the preaching of Protestant and even Reformed communions has not been sufficiently grounded in the hermeneutical principles which Calvin so nobly exemplified.

One feature of Calvin's exegetical work is his concern for the analogy of Scripture. He is always careful to take account of the unity and harmony of Scripture teaching. His expositions are not therefore afflicted with the vice of expounding particular passages without respect to the teaching of Scripture elsewhere and without respect to the system of truth set forth in the Word of God. His exegesis, in a word, is theologically oriented. It is this quality that lies close to that which was *par excellence* his genius.

However highly we assess Calvin's exegetical talent and product, his eminence as an exegete must not be allowed to overshadow what was, after all, his greatest gift. He was *par excellence* a theologian. It was his systematizing genius preeminently that equipped him for the prosecution and completion of his masterpiece.

When we say that he was *par excellence* a theologian we must dissociate from our use of this word every notion that is suggestive of the purely speculative. No one has ever fulminated with more passion and eloquence against "vacuous and meteoric speculation" than has Calvin. And no one has ever been more keenly conscious that the theologian's task was the humble and, at the same time, truly noble one of being a disciple of the Scripture. "No man," he declares, "can have the least knowledge of true and sound doctrine, without having been a disciple of the Scripture. Hence originates all true wisdom, when we embrace with reverence the testimony which God hath been pleased therein to deliver concerning himself. For obedience is the source, not only of an absolutely perfect and complete faith, but of all right knowledge of God" (*Inst.* Book 1 c. 6 s. 2). In the words of William Cunningham: "In theology there is, of course, no room for originality properly so called, for its whole materials are contained in the actual statements of God's word; and he is the greatest and best theologian who has most accurately apprehended the meaning of the statements of Scripture—who, by comparing and combining them, has most fully and correctly brought out the whole mind of God on all the topics on which the Scriptures give us information—who classifies and digests the truths of Scripture in the way best fitted to commend them to the apprehension and acceptance of men—and who can most clearly and forcibly bring out their scriptural evidence, and most skillfully and effectively defend them against the assaults of adversaries . . . Calvin was far above the weakness of aiming at the invention of novelties in theology, or of wishing to be regarded as the discoverer of new opinions" (*The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*, Edinburgh, 1866, p. 296). As we bring even elementary understanding to bear upon our reading of the *Institutes* we shall immediately discover the profound sense of the majesty of God, veneration for the Word of God, and the jealous care for faithful exposition and systematization which were marked features of the author. And because of this we shall find the *Institutes* to be suffused with the warmth of godly fear. The *Institutes* is not only the classic of Christian theology; it is also a model of Christian devotion. For what Calvin sought to foster was that "pure and genuine religion" which consists in "faith united with the serious fear of God, such fear as may embrace voluntary reverence and draw along with it legitimate worship such as is prescribed in the law" (*Inst.* Book 1 c. 2 s. 2).

The present edition is from the translation made by Henry Beveridge in 1845 for the Calvin Translation Society. The reader may be assured that the translation faithfully reflects the teaching of Calvin but must also bear in mind that no translation can perfectly convey the thought of the original. It may also be added that a more adequate translation of

Calvin's *Institutes* into English is a real *desideratum*. In fulfilling this need the translator or translators would perform the greatest service if the work of translation were supplemented by footnotes in which at crucial points, where translation is difficult or most accurate translation impossible, the Latin text would be reproduced and comment made on its more exact import. Furthermore, footnotes which would supply the reader with references to other places in Calvin's writings where he deals with the same subject would be an invaluable help to students of Calvin and to the cause of truth. Admittedly such work requires linguistic skill of the highest order, thorough knowledge of Calvin's writings, and deep sympathy with his theology. It would also involve prodigious labor. We may hope that the seed being sown by the present venture on the part of the Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company may bear fruit some day in such a harvest.

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Original Translator's Preface (1581)

Prefixed to the fourth edition 1581, and reprinted verbatim in all the subsequent editions.

T[homas] N[orton], the Translator; to the Reader.

Good reader, here is now offered you, the fourth time printed in English, Mr. Calvin's book of the *Institutes of Christian Religion*; a book of great labor to the author, and of great profit to the church of God. Mr. Calvin first wrote it when he was a young man, a book of small volume, and since that season he has at sundry times published it with new increases, still protesting at every edition himself to be one of those *qui scribendo proficiunt, et proficiendo scribunt*, which with their writing do grow in profiting, and with their profiting do proceed in writing. At length having, in many of his other works, travailed about exposition of sundry books of the Scriptures, and in the same finding occasion to discourse of sundry common-places and matters of doctrine, which being handled according to the occasions of the text that were offered him, and not in any other method, were not so ready for the reader's use, he therefore entered into this purpose to enlarge this book of *Institutes*, and therein to treat of all those titles and common-places largely, with this intent, that whensoever any occasion fell in his other books to treat of any such cause, he would not newly amplify his books of commentaries and expositions therewith, but refer his reader wholly to this storehouse and treasure of that sort of divine learning. As age and weakness grew upon him, so he hastened his labor; and, according to his petition to God, he in manner ended his life with his work, for he lived not long after.

So great a jewel was meet to be made most beneficial, that is to say, applied to most common use. Therefore, in the very beginning of the Queen's Majesty's most blessed reign, I translated it out of Latin into English for the commodity of the church of Christ, at the special request of my dear friends of worthy memory, Reginald Wolfe and Edward Whitchurch, the one her Majesty's printer for the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin tongues, the other her Highness' printer of the books of Common Prayer. I performed my work in the house of my said friend, Edward Whitchurch, a man well known of upright heart and dealing, an ancient zealous gospeller, as plain and true a friend as ever I knew living, and as desirous to do anything to common good, especially by the advancement of true religion.

At my said first edition of this book, I considered how the author thereof had of long time purposely labored to write the same most exactly, and to pack great plenty of matter in small room of words; yes, and those so circumspectly and precisely ordered, to avoid the cavilations of such as for enmity to the truth therein contained would gladly seek and abuse all advantages which might be found by any oversight in penning of it, that the sentences were thereby become so full as nothing might well be added without idle superfluity, and again so highly pared, that nothing could be minished without taking away some necessary substance of matter therein expressed. This manner of writing, besides the peculiar terms of arts and figures, and the difficulty of the matters themselves, being throughout interlaced with the Schoolmen's controversies, made a great hardness in the author's own book, in that tongue wherein otherwise he is both plentiful and easy, insomuch that it suffices not to read

him once, unless you can be content to read in vain. This consideration encumbered me with great doubtfulness for the whole order and frame of my translation. If I should follow the words, I saw that of necessity the hardness in the translation must needs be greater than was in the tongue wherein it was originally written. If I should leave the course of words, and grant myself liberty after the natural manner of my own tongue, to say that in English which I conceived to be his meaning in Latin, I plainly perceived how hardly I might escape error, and on the other side, in this matter of faith and religion, how perilous it was to err. For I dared not presume to warrant myself to have his meaning without his words. And they that know what it is to translate well and faithfully, especially in matters of religion, do know that not the only grammatical construction of words suffices, but the very building and order to observe all advantages of vehemence or grace, by placing or accent of words, makes much to the true setting forth of a writer's mind.

In the end, I rested upon this determination, to follow the words so near as the phrase of the English tongue would suffer me. Which purpose I so performed, that if the English book were printed in such paper and letter as the Latin is, it should not exceed the Latin in quantity. Whereby, besides all other commodities that a faithful translation of so good a work may bring, this one benefit is moreover provided for such as are desirous to attain some knowledge of the Latin tongue (which is, at this time, to be wished in many of those men for whose profession this book most fitly serves), that they shall not find any more English than shall suffice to construe the Latin withal, except in such few places where the great difference of the phrases of the languages enforced me: so that, comparing the one with the other, they shall both profit in good matter, and furnish themselves with understanding of that speech, wherein the greatest treasures of knowledge are disclosed.

In the doing hereof, I did not only trust my own wit or ability, but examined my whole doing from sentence to sentence throughout the whole book with conference and overlooking of such learned men, as my translation being allowed by their judgment, I did both satisfy my own conscience that I had done truly, and their approving of it might be a good warrant to the reader that nothing should herein be delivered him but sound, unmingled, and uncorrupted doctrine, even in such sort as the author himself had first framed it. All that I wrote, the grave, learned, and virtuous man, Mr. David Whitehead (whom I name with honorable remembrance), did, among others, compare with the Latin, examining every sentence throughout the whole book. Besides all this, I privately required many, and generally all men with whom I ever had any talk of this matter, that if they found anything either not truly translated, or not plainly Englished, they would inform me thereof, promising either to satisfy them or to amend it. Since which time, I have not been advertised by any man of anything which they would require to be altered. Neither had I myself, by reason of my profession, being otherwise occupied, any leisure to peruse it. And that is the cause, why not only at the second and third time, but also at this impression, you have no change at all in the work, but altogether as it was before.

Indeed, I perceived many men well-minded and studious of this book, to require a table for their ease and furtherance. Their honest desire I have fulfilled in the second edition, and have added thereto a plentiful table, which is also here inserted, which I have translated out of the Latin, wherein the principal matters discoursed in this book are named by their due titles in order of alphabet, and under every title is set forth a brief sum of the whole doctrine taught in this book concerning the matter belonging to that title or common-place; and therewith is added the book, chapter, and section or division of the chapter, where the same

doctrine is more largely expressed and proved. And for the reader finding thereof, I have caused the number of the chapters to be set upon every leaf in the book, and quoted the sections also by their due numbers with the usual figures of algorism. And now at this last publishing, my friends, by whose charge it is now newly imprinted in a Roman letter and smaller volume, with diverse other tables which, since my second edition, were gathered by Mr. Marlorate, to be translated and here added for your benefit.

Moreover, whereas in the first edition the evil manner of my scribbling hand, the interlining of my copy, and some other causes well known among workmen of that faculty, made very many faults to pass the printer, I have, in the second impression, caused the book to be composed by the printed copy, and corrected by the written; whereby it must needs be that it was much more truly done than the other was, as I myself do know above three hundred faults amended. And now at this last printing, the composing after a printed copy brings some ease, and the diligence used about the correction having been right faithfully looked unto, it cannot be but much more truly set forth. This also is performed, that the volume being smaller, with a letter fair and legible, it is of more easy price, that it may be of more common use, and so to more large communicating of so great a treasure to those that desire Christian knowledge for instruction of their faith, and guiding of their duties. Thus, on the printer's behalf and mine, your ease and commodity (good readers) provided for. Now rest your own diligence, for your own profit, in studying it.

To spend many words in commending the work itself were needless; yet thus much I think, I may both not unruly and not vainly say, that though many great learned men have written books of common-places of our religion, as Melancthon, Sarcerius, and others, whose works are very good and profitable to the church of God, yet by the consenting judgment of those that understand the same, there is none to be compared to this work of Calvin, both for his substantial sufficiency of doctrine, the sound declaration of truth in articles of our religion, the large and learned confirmation of the same, and the most deep and strong confutation of all old and new heresies; so that (the holy Scriptures excepted) this is one of the most profitable books for all students of Christian divinity. Wherein (good readers), as I am glad for the glory of God, and for your benefit, that you may have this profit of my travel, so I beseech you let me have this use of your gentleness, that my doings may be construed to such good end as I have meant them; and that if any thing mislike you by reason of hardness, or any other cause that may seem to be my default, you will not forthwith condemn the work, but read it after; in which doing you will find (as many have confessed to me that they have found by experience) that those things which at the first reading shall displease you for hardness, shall be found so easy as so hard matter would suffer, and, for the most part, more easy than some other phrase which should with greater looseness and smoother sliding away deceive your understanding. I confess, indeed, it is not finely and pleasantly written, nor carries with it such delightful grace of speech as some great wise men have bestowed upon some foolisher things, yet it contains sound truth set forth with faithful plainness, without wrong done to the author's meaning; and so, if you accept and use it, you shall not fail to have great profit thereby, and I shall think my labor very well employed.

Thomas Norton